“We’re Going to be the Last Ones Standing”

A Qualitative Insight into the Organizational Resilience of Small and Micro Tourism Enterprises Facing COVID-19

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Abstract

Purpose: To understand organizational resilience from the perspective of small-to-medium enterprise (SME) business owners and operators in the tourism sector, in relation to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Approach: First-hand qualitative information was gathered from 10 such businesses through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis of their responses gave insight into which aspects of pre-existing organizational resilience frameworks are applicable, and which are impracticable.

Findings: Recommendations for overcoming barriers to resilience have been generated, with specific relevance to the experience of SMEs in tourism. These recommendations highlight seven specific activities/capabilities and eight specific characteristics that can build SME resilience – such as network capability, staff engagement and empowerment, and creativity.

Research Implications: Findings demonstrate that SMEs have both restricted resources and enhanced flexibility, which make them significantly different to the larger organizations that tend to be the focus of organizational resilience research. Having established these differences, further quantiative research is warranted, to build upon the qualitiative foundations outlined here.

Practical Implications: Tourism SMEs can take guidance from the new model of resilience presented in this paper, in place of previous models that do not account for their unique operating contexts, to better prepare themselves for future adversities.

Originality: This is the first qualitative study of SME resilience in the context of COVID-19, specific to the tourism sector of Canterbury New Zealand.

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Last and also least, thanks to COVID – something good did come of you.

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Introduction

International travel and tourism aggravate the spread of disease outbreaks, requiring the development of containment measures to control it. Yet, these very measures have a drastic and often detrimental impact on the tourism industry (Gössling et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2016). In recent history, this relationship was demonstrated during the 2002 outbreak of SARS, and it is now illustrated in the extreme by the outbreak of COVID-19 (Zeng et al., 2005; Hall et al., 2020). International travel has spread this virus to nearly every nation in the world, and three-quarters of countries opted to close off their borders to international tourism as a result (UNTWO, 2020).

COVID-19 is a novel strand of coronavirus, which is highly contagious and potentially fatal to those who contract it (Ministry of Health, 2020). The virus spread rapidly across the globe throughout February 2020, causing the World Health Organization to officially declare the virus outbreak as a pandemic on the 11 March (World Health Organization, 2020). In an attempt to control the spread and save lives, New Zealand entered into a four-tier system of "alert levels". The most restrictive level involves all citizens - other than a select few deemed as 'essential workers' - isolating at home at all times (Unite Against COVID-19, 2020). These maximum-level restrictions were upheld for five weeks in a period of countrywide lockdown from 25 March to 28 April. The restrictions were slowly relaxed thereafter, but the alert level remains susceptible to change by the Government at any moment.

Operating at lower alert levels brings respite for the majority of industries, as businesses are welcome to operate under some restrictions at level two, and activity is virtually unrestricted within the country at level one (Unite Against COVID-19, 2020). The exception to this rule is international travel, as the New Zealand border has been closed to non-residents since 20 March and remains closed for an indeterminate amount of time. For a country that benefits greatly from international tourism, namely through over $17 billion

dollars in expenditure, the border closures present a significant challenge (Tourism NZ, 2020). To address this, the Government was able to provide financial support for businesses suffering substantial revenue loss, in the form of a wage subsidy (Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment, 2020a). However, this temporary financial assistance, which ended in September, will likely not suffice to keep many tourism businesses afloat for the long term, as it is predicted that the sector will not return to pre-COVID levels of operation for years to come (ASB, 2020).

Despite the clear adversity in terms of accessibility to international tourists as a market, some tourism businesses are able to survive and even thrive in the face of pandemics and other crises and disasters, i.e., exhibit organizational resilience – which is defined as the "incremental capacity of an organization to anticipate and adjust to the environment" (Ortiz-de-Mandojana & Bansal, 2016, p. 1617). There is a growing field of literature in the domain of organizational resilience that is dedicated to uncovering the key elements contributing to an organization's ability to bounce back and even capitalize on disasters (e.g., Dahles and Susilowati, 2015; Tasic et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2020). Such knowledge might transfer across adversity types, and is therefore vital for helping businesses navigate the increasingly complex nature of crises that arise from globalization and rapid technological changes (Kates & Parris, 2003). Nevertheless, the shortcoming of many established resilience studies is the issue of generalizability across industry sectors (Sapeciay et al., 2016). Each industry has unique characteristics, and faces equally unique challenges. Specific insight and research into each sector is needed to fully grasp these distinctions, and as Hall et al. (2017) note, there is currently little existing research on organizational resilience in the tourism and hospitality industries globally, including New Zealand. While generalized organizational resilience studies can give some direction to businesses in the tourism sector, they do not consider

challenges such as the seasonal nature of the demand for their services, and the higher level of turnover that they experience relative to other industries (Williams et al., 2008).

Furthermore, many businesses in the tourism industry have a symbiotic relationship with the environment. For example, nature-based tourism operators have a vested interest in preserving their surrounding ecosystems (Biggs et al., 2012). This also means that many tourism operators must learn to function around the volatility of nature, so they must be additionally adaptive and responsive. The concern for this relationship is absent in many other sectors, and adds to the complexity of decision-making for tourism businesses.

While these characteristics may appear as limitations for tourism operators, they also constitute advantages. Oftentimes tourism operations are small with simple organizational structures, and thus it is easier for management to be flexible and implement changes as needed (Jiang et al., 2019). The current COVID-19 context is an opportune time to evaluate and explore the ways in which tourism operators can leverage these advantages, and mitigate existing challenges. Gössling et al. (2020), who have recently published an assessment of the unfolding pandemic, state that the recovery journey for tourism operators in the face of COVID-19 should not be a desperate attempt to return to pre-pandemic normality. Instead, it presents an opportunity for positive transformation, with a move toward more viable business models than can withstand an increasingly uncertain future. The need for such change will only intensify going forwards, as the tourism sector faces issues like global warming and resource exploitation.

This research aims to evaluate how well conventional organizational resilience frameworks apply to SMEs, identifying discontinuities and generalizable elements. To that end, the study describes the experiences of a cohort of small-to-medium enterprisers (SMEs) in the Canterbury tourism industry operating through the global pandemic, uncovers how these organizations are building their resilience, and explores how they have adapted to cope

with the impacts of COVID-19. It also questions whether the experience of other disasters, namely the 2011 Christchurch earthquake, has contributed to building the resilience of tourism SMEs in the Canterbury context, and if so what the learnings from those experiences have been.

Literature Review

Organizational Resilience

Resilience as a general concept stems from the physical sciences, where it was initially used to describe the efficiency of the homeostatic process wherein systems return to an origin point following disturbance (Norris et al., 2007). Since its development in this context, resilience has been applied to a multitude of other disciplines – including engineering, ecology, and social sciences – and it has taken on a wide variety of definitions accordingly. Where organizational resilience is concerned, many contemporary definitions take the original concept of resilience as an indication of a system's ability to restore equilibrium after a disruption, and build upon it with the idea that some systems may be able to use the disturbance as an opportunity to transcend their previous status (e.g., Seville et al., 2008; DesJardine et al., 2019).

As the number and complexity of issues facing organizations today continues to grow, so too does the body of research that attempts to define and explain the latent concept of organizational resilience (Jia et al., 2020; McManus et al., 2008). To put a convoluted concept into simple terms, Vogus and Sutcliffe (2007, pg. 1) define organizational resilience as "maintenance of positive adjustment under challenging conditions, such that the organization emerges from those conditions strengthened and more resourceful". Further work by Lee et al. (2013) outlines organizational resilience as having two differentiated aspects – planned and adaptive – wherein the planned aspect refers to organizations' pre-event preparedness, and the adaptive aspect refers to their ability to adjust in the period following the event. Organizations that can adequately manage this duality are more likely to handle unexpected events well, experience shorter recovery times following adversities, and flourish in the long-term (Nilakant et al., 2016). It is important to note, however, that the foundational research on planned and adaptive

resilience discussed here was not developed specifically for SMEs, nor tourism enterprises. Further exploration would suggest that these concepts differ depending on organizational characteristics – for example, a study by Orchiston et al. (2016) found that some aspects of planned and adaptive resilience or present differently in tourism businesses, likely because they operate in volatile environments and thus tend to be more forward-looking. Unlike other sectors, these businesses are uniquely affected by seasonality, climate change, media focus, high turnover, and other contextual factors (Biggs et al., 2012; Ritchie, 2008; Scott et al., 2019).

Organizational Resilience Frameworks

Multiple tools, such as the Benchmark Resilience Tool (BRT-53) have been developed to address the measurement issues surround organizational resilience (Whitman et al., 2013). This is important work to enable companies to assess their own resilience levels, identify areas for improvement, and strengthen themselves against the uncertainty of the future. Beyond the benefits to the organization, research recognizes that business recovery following a crisis is also pivotal for the social and economic wellbeing of the communities in which it operates (Kachali et al., 2012). In this way, building organizational resilience not only benefits the members of the company itself, but it also has positive externalities for the country at large.

In line with this, international collectives such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation have put significant resourcing into the development of tools such as the "Authoritative Guide to Managing Crises and Disasters" (Wilks & Moore, 2004) to make resilience assessment more readily accessible for organization owners and managers. The prescriptive guidelines for resilience assessment of this particular tool and many others like it follow the theoretical framework referred to as "The 4Rs" – Reduction, Readiness, Response and Recovery. In terms of pre-emption, the first phase (reduction) focuses on

risk and loss mitigation through early identification of possible warning signs, and the second phase (readiness) centres on contingency planning through exercises and drills. In terms of reaction, the third phase (response) pertains to effective operation and communication in the face of crisis, and the fourth phase (recovery) is returning the organization to "normal" in the aftermath. Following best practice guidelines in all four phases is imperative to managing crises and achieving positive business outcomes. An organization's crisis management is considered effective if they are continuously working to improve their performance in the first two phases, in anticipation of the latter two (Ritchie, 2008; Wilks & Moore, 2004).

This framework suggests that resilience is built in the reduction and readiness phases, and enacted and further developed for survival in the response and recovery phases. While this temporal framework is practical and easy to comprehend, it falls short of capturing the dynamic, non-linear facets of disaster recovery, which is where resilience-centric theories have value. In one such contribution, Gibson and Tarrant (2010) completed a meta-analytic review of organizational resilience literature and used their findings to develop a theoretical model. The Herringbone Resilience Model (see Figure 1 for the model and Appendix A for definitions of its elements) consists of the dynamic and inter-dependent capabilities and characteristics of an organisation that significantly affect its performance through their role in building or maintaining resilience. Within this model, examples of organisational activities and capabilities that contribute to resilience include good quality relationship management, risk management, compliance and resource capability. Organisational characteristics linked to organisational resilience are exemplified by sound leadership with clear strategic direction, tolerance for ambiguity, and high levels of trust between members of the organization.

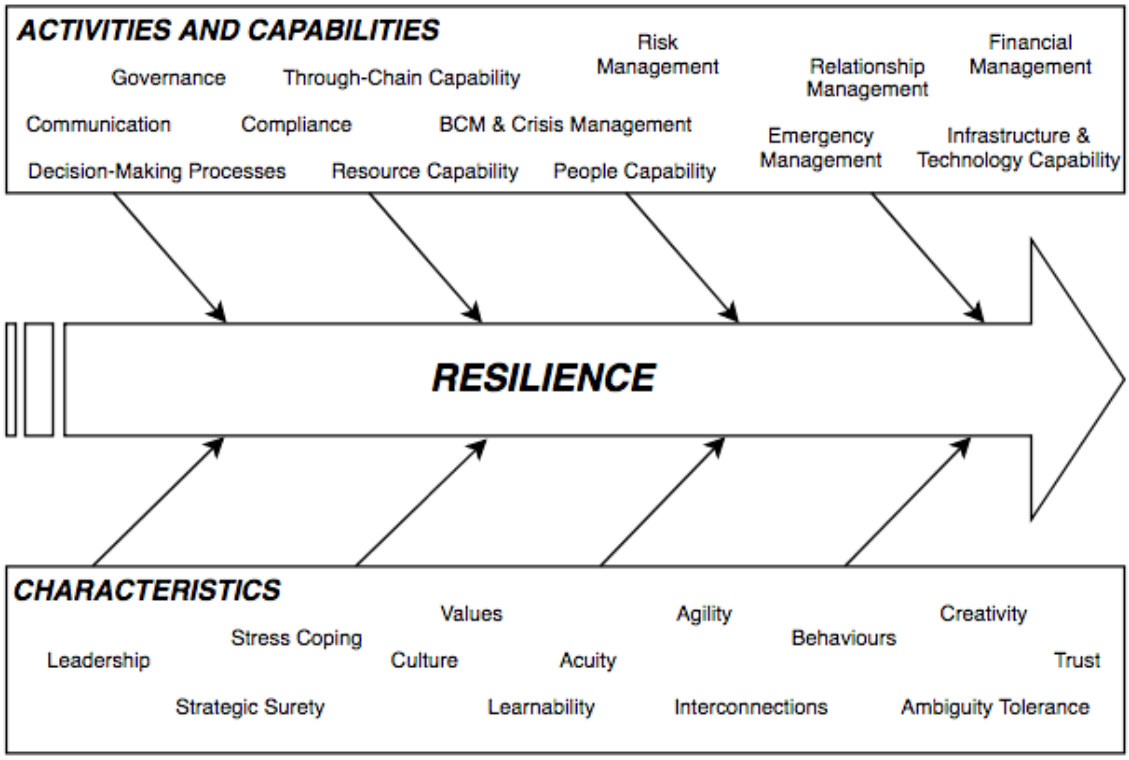

Figure 1: Herringbone Resilience Model (adapted from Gibson & Tarrant, 2010)

In following with the theory behind the Herringbone model, organizations should take care to develop proficiencies in all the mentioned areas to the best of their ability in ordinary times of operation, in order to be best prepared for the extraordinary. Gibson and Tarrant (2010) suggest that the characteristics of acuity or situational awareness, ambiguity tolerance, creativity, agility, stress coping and learnability are the most vital aspects to consider for extraordinary times. However, they also remark that the relative importance and contribution of each factor is dependent on circumstance. It is worth noting that Gibson and Tarrant (2010) intended for this model to encapsulate the multiple resilience-promoting factors brought forth by other theories, and be a "one-stop shop" for organizations of all sizes and industries to identify and develop these factors. The model was not developed with consideration for practical limitations on an organization's ability to reach the ideal state of high-level planned and adaptive resilience. One common criticism of organizational resilience models such as this one is their generalizability to

more niche sectors with unique characteristics, and to SMEs – which often have compact networks, informal procedures and limited discretion over resources (Branicki et al., 2018). While some of the elements in this model would be generalizable across industries and organizations of various sizes, others would not be relevant or present in different ways to SMEs or the sector examined in the current study. For instance, research supports that while SMEs tend to exhibit high levels of 'agility' due to being able to quickly adapt their systems, many of these smaller organisations do not engage in formal 'financial management' due to resource constraints (Battisti & Deakins, 2012; Smallbone et al. 2012). For SMEs looking to models such as the Herringbone for practical guidance on how to enhance their resilience, the inclusion of extraneous elements can be detrimental. In enterprises with already heavily constrained resources, efficiency is of the utmost importance; the margin of error for misallocating resources is narrow. Equally injurious is the oversight of elements considered key in smaller businesses, omitted from "one stop shop" models because they are not necessarily applicable to larger firms. Some such elements would likely include the personal characteristics of entrepreneurs – like optimism and perseverance – because the resilience of the owner/operator is particularly pivotal in SMEs, whereas employee resilience is emphasized in larger organizations (Fang et al., 2019). If SME attention is misdirected by the guidance of models that are not appropriate for their features, they will be unable to adequately prepare for disaster. This accentuates the need for practical research conducted exclusively with smaller businesses, to decipher the areas of resilience building where SME attention is most effective.

Entrepreneurial Resilience

New Zealand defines SMEs as businesses with fewer than 19 employees, a low cut-off by international comparison, yet reflective of New Zealand's economic and social context (Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment, 2020a). The country is small and

relatively isolated, with a reputation for entrepreneurship and ingenuity that is reflected in not just colloquial but also actuarial ways, as 28% of New Zealand's national GDP is generated by enterprises with less than 20 employees (de Vries & Shield, 2006; Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment, 2017). Battisti and Deakins (2012) argue that SMEs in the tourism industry have the potential to be powerhouses in times of crisis, due to being more flexible and having the ability to make necessary changes more quickly than their larger counterparts. These factors make the concept of SME resilience are all the more pertinent to smaller nations such as New Zealand, for whom SMEs and tourism represent key sources of revenue.

Entrepreneurial resilience can be considered as the concept that life experience leads entrepreneurs to develop a set of ongoing behaviours, which enable them to sustain their business efforts and succeed in the long-term (de Vries & Shields, 2006). Based on a multi-disciplinary research synthesis by de Vries and Shields (2006), entrepreneurs exhibit four main categories of resilient behaviours: flexibility, high motivation, perseverance and optimism. Flexibility is demonstrated by entrepreneurs that are able to tolerate ambiguity and change; high motivation is evident in those who are actively and continuously goal-seeking; perseverance comes through as a refusal to quit in the face of adversity; and optimism is exhibited as a persistently positive outlook with a mind-set geared toward opportunity.

While entrepreneurial resilience as a concept is now reasonably well researched and understood, only recently have studies like that of Branicki et al. (2018) attempted to integrate the ideas of individually-resilient entrepreneurs with organizationally-resilient SMEs. Such works reiterate the potential value of amalgamating concepts from both entrepreneurial resilience and organizational resilience, and using that comprehensive

approach to transform the two wide, theoretical concepts into specific and practical guidance for SMEs.

Present Study

As highlighted by Fang et al. (2019), there is a paucity of empirical evidence that exists to explain what tourism SMEs actually do in the face of a crisis, and what underpins their resilience. The current context of COVID-19 presents a unique opportunity for research that can help to fill that gap, with a focus on examining resilience as it pertains to SMEs in the tourism industry. This opportunity already being seized by researchers in other cultural contexts, such as Pathak and Joshi (2020) in India, and Sobaih et al. (2021) in Egypt. While such studies will be insightful for the SME resilience literature, the New Zealand perspective will add to this body of knowledge, as the nation's experience of COVID-19 impact is distinct due to its geographic remoteness and its success in virtually eliminating the virus early on (Summers et al., 2020).

Unprecedented issues that are evident in this crisis compared to historic events include the indefinite closure of the international border, and the Government-mandated shut down of businesses deemed non-essential, including all tourism operations. Because of this, even tourism businesses that have faced disasters before will likely not be fully prepared for a pandemic, though there may be some transferrable experiences and lessons (Norris et al., 2007). The present study has focused solely on operators in the Canterbury region, as they have faced two events in recent history that meet the definition of a disaster: the 2011 earthquake and the 2019 terrorist attack (Television New Zealand, 2020). Research regarding resilience in the aftermath of disasters of this nature suggests that enterprises can bounce back from the adversities, take the opportunity to improve and even feel better prepared for future crises because of the experience (de Vries & Hamilton, 2016; Gurtner, 2017; Orchiston et al., 2012). Therefore, in theory, Canterbury

tourism SMEs may be able to draw on these experiences in order to strengthen their response to an unforeseen event, like the coronavirus pandemic.

In following with the call for empirical evidence of how SMEs exhibit resilience, qualitative research methodology was chosen as it has long been regarded as a valuable tool for reflecting the reality of experience, and bringing research into line with practice (Black, 1994). To conduct this qualitative project, a structured interview schedule was developed which follows the practical guidance of the '4R framework', integrates the dynamic organizational resilience facets from the Herringbone model, and incorporates concepts from entrepreneurial resilience that attend to the unique characteristics of SMEs. It is expected that findings from this study will contribute a nascent line of investigation that will elucidate resilience development guidelines for smaller businesses in the tourism industry.

Method

This research aims to explore the practicality and generalizability of the 4R framework, the Herringbone model, and the entrepreneurial resilience research to SMEs in the tourism sector. Because there is guidance from all of these three aspects but none are holistic, the present study aims to bring forward new information about the little known actual experiences and strategies of SMEs in the tourism industry, at a time of crisis. In light of this, the approach to the research is both inductive and deductive, as it simultaneously tests the applicability of mainstream models of organisational resilience to tourism SME contexts, and seeks to uncover resilience factors unique to this sector.

Sample

Research suggests that SMEs differ from larger organizations enough to warrant their separation in empirical studies on resilience. For this reason, only businesses with less than 19 staff were considered as potential participants for the study, as this is the upper limit of SME business size in New Zealand (Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment, 2020a). It was also decided that only businesses from the Canterbury region would be suitable for inclusion, given that the region has experienced a unique timeline of crises in recent history, such as the earthquakes and terrorist attack.

In following with this, access was gained to a database of SMEs in the Canterbury region used for a previous study through the Universities of Canterbury and Otago, regarding the impact of the 2011 Christchurch earthquake on their businesses (see Prayag et al., 2020, for further details). The potential participant database was updated through the removal of businesses that had since closed and the addition of new businesses that had since opened. Further exclusion criteria was applied with regards to shareholding, such that businesses owned by the council,

Government or trusts were removed, in the interests of avoiding confounds arising from vastly different access to financial resources and management styles.

Drawn from the subsample, a total of 30 businesses were contacted regarding the study via phone and/or email. Participants were not offered financial incentives for their participation. Of the businesses contacted, 10 agreed to participate in interviews, which made for a sample size similar to that of other qualitative studies on SMEs in the tourism industry (see By & Dale, 2008; Binder et al., 2016). Two businesses opted to have two representatives, so of the 12 people who participated, the gender split was 33% female, and 66% of participants had completed tertiary education. Further demographic classification of these participants can be reviewed in Appendix C.

With regards to organizational characteristics, the subsectors of accomodation (50%), food and beverage (20%), touring (20%) and recreational activities (20%) were represented in the sample, which consisted of seven small businesses with between five and 15 employees, and three micro businesses with less than five employees. These organizations are outlined in Table 1 below for future reference throughout the text.

Table 1. Summary of Participants

	Sector	Size
01	Accommodation	Small
02	Accommodation	Small
03	Accommodation	Micro
04	Accommodation	Micro
05	Accommodation	Micro
06	Food and Beverage (F&B)	Small
07	F&B/ Recreation	Small
08	Recreation	Small
09	Tour	Small
10	Tour	Small

Following the 10th interview it was acknowledged that the study had likely reached saturation, as gathering further responses was no longer uncovering novel ideas, and thus it was deemed appropriate to conclude data collection (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

Research Materials and Procedure

Table 2 below shows the development of the interview schedule, informed by the resilience literature. Rigidly structured interviews leave little room for flexibility and variation, so while the schedule below guided the conversations, the interviews were semi-structured with impromptu follow-up questioning where appropriate. This opened up the conversation for additional information related to the interviewees' emotional and perceptive responses, which are invaluable in exploratory research (Punch, 2005). As a result, this style of research allowed for the exploration of resilience enablers and hindering factors that are not presently accounted for in mainstream organizational resilience models.

Table 2. Informed Construction of Interview Schedule

Question	Underlying Concept(s)	Relevant Literature
Culture, Structure and Leadership		
1. Can you talk briefly about the reporting lines in your organization?	Relationship Management, Interconnections, Governance	Herringbone Model (Gibson and Tarrant, 2010), Branicki et al. (2018)
2. How are tasks delegated in this organization?	Trust, People Capability, Governance	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), Lee et al. (2013)
3. How would you describe staff empowerment in this organization? • How do you communicate any changes with your staff? For example, new goals or changes to daily tasks. • How do you invite staff to participate in making suggestions? (e.g. formal consultation or case-by-case basis?) • How do you support staff wellbeing?	Communication, Leadership, Decision-Making Processes, Through-Chain Capabilities	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), Lee et al. (2013)
4. If I mention the word leadership, what are some of the ideas that come to your mind? • How would you describe your own leadership in this organization? • What are your main strengths as a leader and what are some of the things you would like to develop further in this space?	Leadership, Culture, Values	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), Lee et al. (2013)
5. What do you normally do as an individual when faced with a crisis or unexpected event in your personal life? • Do you feel confident about your ability to manage such events? • In what ways do you incorporate these experiences in making business related decisions?	Learnability, Stress Coping, Ambiguity Tolerance, Self-Efficacy	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), deVries and Shields (2006), Branicki et al. (2018)

6. What are your general guidelines around health and safety? • How often do you review your health and safety procedures? • How do you communicate these guidelines to staff?	Compliance, Risk Management, Emergency Management	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), Wilks and Moore (2004)
Crisis, Lockdown and Recovery		
7. How did you prepare for the nationwide lockdown? • When did you recognize the need to plan for lockdown? • Who was involved in outlining the lockdown plan?	Acuity, Leadership, Communication, Decision-Making Processes, BCM & Crisis Management	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), Wilks and Moore (2004)
8. How did you support your staff into and throughout lockdown? • How have you continued to support staff after resuming business?	Culture, Values, Communication	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), Lee et al. (2013)
9. Can you tell me if your supply chain was disrupted by lockdown and if so, how?	BCM & Crisis Management, Agility, Interconnections	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), Kamalahmadi and Parast (2016)
10. To what extent does your organization have reliable partnerships with other organizations and local agencies? • Do you have collaborations with other similar business? Can you describe these?	Interconnections, Relationship Management, Network	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), Branicki et al. (2018), Becken et al. (2014)
11. Are you foreseeing any changes on the political front that will affect this business? • Is this organization benefiting from the wage subsidy? • How well is the wage subsidy working for you? • How are you finding the current government support for your business?	Acuity, Political Awareness	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), Wilks and Moore (2004)
12. How does your current level of operation compare to that of pre-lockdown? • Have you had to make redundancies amongst staff? If not, how have you managed to keep everyone on?	BCM & Crisis Management, Financial Management	Gibson and Tarrant (2010)

13. What changes did you bring to the organization during and after lockdown? • Did you shift your market focus? • Did you create or enhance online presence? • How were these changes communicated to staff and were they involved in any of the changes/decision making?	Agility, Creativity, Resource Capability, Infrastructure and Technology Capability, Communication, Flexibility	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), DeVries and Shields (2006), Branicki et al. (2018), Fang et al. (2019)
14. How has this experience been similar to or different from the earthquake?	Learnability, Acuity, Stress Coping, Risk Management	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), Branicki et al. (2018)
15. What, if anything, would you have done differently in retrospect? (Since February)	Acuity, Learnability, Optimism, Self-Efficacy	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), DeVries and Shields (2006), Fang et al. (2019)
16. Reflecting on the global impact of COVID-19, how do you think the future of the NZ tourism sector might look? • What might that mean for your organization? • How confident do you feel about the future of your business?	Ambiguity Tolerance, Perseverance	Gibson and Tarrant (2010), DeVries and Shields (2006), Branicki et al. (2018),

All 10 interviews were conducted face-to-face, either on site at the business or in a neutral meeting space such as a café at the request of the participant. In two of the 10 interviews, the participant opted to have a second member of their organization join them, and in both instances the second participant was at an equivalent managerial level. The interviews averaged around one hour in duration, and followed the semi-structured schedule outlined in Table 2. Each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed, and transcriptions were re-checked against the audio to ensure high accuracy.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen for this study as it has multiple relevant advantages that synchronize well with the research objectives. As per Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis can generate unanticipated insights, which attends to the study's intent to discover aspects of resilience that are unique to SMEs. It can also be useful for producing practical analysis suitable for informing the development of strategy and procedure, which complements the research objective of using the outcomes of this study to give SMEs operational guidance. Furthermore, the results drawn from thematic analysis are generally less convoluted and more readily understood by the general public, which again supports the research emphasis on practicality.

The procedure of thematic analysis largely followed the phases outlined in Braun and Clarke's (2006) qualitative research guidance paper. The approach to thematic analysis was theoretical, due to the informative use of pre-existing frameworks; namely the Herringbone Model. Each phase of analysis and the associated recursions are outlined below.

Firstly, the process of 'data familiarization' began with transcription, and to deepen this the transcripts were read and re-read repeatedly. The data corpus was then

uploaded to the qualitative software application NVivo. The cluster analysis feature was used to preliminarily organize the data, highlighting frequently occurring concepts across the interviews, which were noted down.

Following familiarization, initial codes were generated. The data was manually coded through a process of drawing out simplified points from each individual question response, and noting these down in the margins of the original transcripts. Coding was indiscriminate in the sense that it was intended to cover as many potential themes as possible. This is recommended per Braun and Clarke (2006), given that some data may fit the pre-existing theoretical framework but novel themes would have equally important implications for the study.

The codes were then combined into groups based on similarity, and these groups were then assigned an initial summarizing title. This process had a dual purpose and thus involved two mechanisms. Firstly, as the research took a partially deductive approach, the codes were arranged according to aspects of the Herringbone that were evident in the data. These groups mapped well onto the original interview questions as intended (see Table 2). Secondly, as the research was intended to also discover new concepts specific to SMEs, the codes that did not fit into "Herringbone" groups were also grouped and titled. This process was completed in a "mind mapping" format, which can be viewed in the image in Appendix B.

With consideration toward the mind-map of groupings, a series of themes were generated, by combining similar groups. Within each theme, a number of subthemes were identified. These themes were then assessed across a variety of aspects: external heterogeneity, such that the themes were sufficiently different from each other in terms of the aspects of resilience that they explain; internal homogeneity, such that each theme and its subthemes were sufficiently cohesive; and

explanatory power, such that each theme was genuinely reflective of the initial codes and groups. This phase was particularly recursive to ensure good fit. Once the above conditions were satisfied, the themes were given summarizing titles and explanations.

With regards to the finalized themes and subthemes, the following results section was produced. Taking these themes back to the original data, they were assessed for prevalence, and exemplary quotes were drawn out as supporting evidence (see Appendix C and Table 3). This conveys the illuminating narrative provided by the participants for theoretical interpretation.

Results

The results of the thematic data analysis outlined above will be presented here along the following sub-sections: identification and description of each theme, and depiction of the relationship between the themes identified and the theoretical framework of the Herringbone Model, with supporting evidence from the interviews (in Table 3). A summary of demographics alongside theme prevalence is available in the form of matrices in Appendix C. The interviews were systematically condensed into these matrices, which are often used in qualitative research to provide the basis for inferences and second-order generalizations (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin 1998).

Overarching Themes

Business Growth Opportunities

90% of participants spoke of either taking steps to open their business into new avenues, or having the desire to do so. Looking at new opportunities constituted *shifting market focus*, either within or outside of the tourism industry, which reflects the Herringbone resilience model component of agility (Gibson & Tarrant, 2010). This also demonstrated the business's level of *creativity,* and openness to changing their way of operating. In demonstration of these concepts, organization's showed a variety of behavioural responses - such as delegating possible avenues to staff members to research and present to the team, catering to the family market where they hadn't before, and repurposing their infrastructure toward the wedding or emergency accomodation sectors.

Barriers to Resilience

Participants often emphasized, with frustration, that much of the difficulty they were facing with regards to navigating the crisis had to do with factors outside of their

control. A *lack of alignment between government/council policy-making and their own business expectations* was cited by 80% of participants as a source of irritation. One commonly mentioned source of irritatation was restricted access to wage subsidies – as the New Zealand Government chose to end their wage subsidy scheme after eight weeks when most sectors were able to return to "business as usual" at alert level one, however tourism operators were still feeling the impacts of the ongoing border closure (Employment New Zealand, 2020). Many participants felt as though this was an oversight on the Government's behalf.

In further barriers to resilience, on the topics of *technology* and *external support networks*, 70% of participants felt one or both these were areas they were restricted in – so that even if they were making some use of technology and/or external support, they felt there could be more done in this space if they had adequate resources to access them, such as making their website more user-friendly or developing a business app. In this way, the data gathered from operators in the study would suggest the Herringbone model overestimates SMEs abilities, as these components are emphasized as important in the original model and yet essentially inaccessible for many SMEs.

Valuable Employee Relations

Despite the lack of resourcing that is characteristic of SMEs, 60% of participants discussed a positive approach to employee care through *enhancing wellbeing*, *engaging employees*, and/or *empowering employees.* Some participants were able to demonstrate concrete ways in which they practiced these, and others conveyed that they considered these factors to be of importance. Companies who showed investment in their employees also showed how this had paid off for their businesses – for example, a company that enabled their employees to access external counselling

mentioned that their staff reciprocated by committing to researching new business avenues during lockdown. Another company that empowerd its staff to bring their hobbies and skills to the workplace found that they were able to use these extra abilities to benefit the business, by providing drone footage and video editing skills to enhance the company's online marketing. This is analogous to what the Herringbone would suggest, in line with a focus on developing culture and people capability in ordinary times, to enhance resilience in times of crisis.

Entrepreneurial Leadership

There were multiple commonalities across the interviews with regards to the characteristics of participants as leaders in their respective businesses. Participants often displayed the use of *life experience (*80%*), optimism (*70%*), perseverance (*90%*)*, the instilling of a *tight knit structure (*70%*)*, and *personal investment as motivation* (90%) in their work. Participants demonstrated that these characteristics were advantageous for the business in a number of ways – through their optimisim and perserverance being mimicked by staff, or through the motivation they derived from their personal investment in the business giving them the determination to find ways of operating despite the difficulties. This was to be expected, given that these characteristics are reflective of the existing literature around resilient entrepreneurial leadership (de Vries & Shields, 2006).

Informal Nature of Policies

While there were multiple organization-related resilience issues that participants discussed as being beyond their control, there were other factors that participants brought up, which were arguably under their influence. Often, the participants did not actually recognize these as issues, but as neutral characteristics of their business. These factors included *lack of preparedness* for the impending crisis (90%), *role*

ambiguity for the participant and/or their staff (50%), and *ill-defined procedures* within the company (60%). To illustrate, many interviewees reported not taking the crisis seriously until lockdown had been announced, struggled to define an outline of their role, and/or revealed that they did not have written health and safety guidelines to work with. Gibson and Tarrant's Herringbone Model (2010) posits that activites such as risk management, business continuity management and crisis management can be undertaken to improve resilience – however, this data would suggest SMEs see these activities as being inaccessible, and therefore do not prioritize their development.

Table 3. Evidence of Themes and Analogies with Theoretical Framework

Theme	Subtheme	Analogous Herringbone Concept	Exemplary Quotes
Opportunities for growth	Shifting market focus	Agility	"We've taken every opportunity to go local, we're on every app, every website and every local-based marketing thing we could find."
			"We were thinking of offering the space for weddings, and coming up with a fancy plan for that. We could completely repurpose"
	Creative Flexibility	Creativity	"We had a talk about how we could pivot, everyone got a little job looking at new things we could offer to the market."
			"[My staff] are all looking at what they have to do differently to be better than last year, what they have to do to set a new record… because we decided right from the word go that we're going to be the last ones standing"
Barriers to resilience	Policy-making and business expectations (Lack of alignment)	Governance	"There's nobody advocating for us… Tourism New Zealand has been given millions of dollars by the Government and none of that, in the last 23 years we've been here, has ever been spent on a strategy for backpackers and to me that's wrong because we're contributing but we're not receiving."
			"I think this Government has been very lacking in terms of its approach to Tourism, given that it's such a huge earner for the country. They seem to be almost as negative towards the tourism industry as they are towards the farming industry. The Minister for Tourism is as useless as tits on a bull."
	(In)effective networks and relationships	Relationship management	"No, there is no support… We've tried to establish that but it just doesn't work. I just don't have the time for that stuff, which is one of the dilemmas for a small business operator."
			"Partnerships… No, we don't have partnerships. We have our supply chain and people we have to deal with, that's kind of it."

	(In)ability to invest in technology	Infrastructure and technology capability	"I'm trying to enhance my online presence, but I can't do that, I don't have the budget to get someone to do it, and I'm not technically savvy enough to do it myself." "I'd like to get some better online marketing going but I haven't got the money to pay someone for that."
Valuable Employee Relations	Enhancing wellbeing	Culture	"If a [staff member] is going through personal issues, we've found that they're generally quite happy to come to us and tell us about it. I think communication is generally really relaxed, it's not like a corporate situation." "I like to think I know when someone's not happy. For example with one of the girls… She wasn't her normal bouncy self, and finally she came clean to us and we set her on a path to help with her mental health."
	Engaging employees	People capability	"The other thing we do, to keep our staff happy and working for us for a long time, is that we rotate their positions so that every single staff member learns the different aspects of the job… They're learning a bigger range of skills." "We've really utilized the skillset and interest areas of our staff – like one girl who makes movies and one guy who has a drone, so it's been good to get them using those sorts of things for our marketing."
	Empowering employees	People capability	"We'll give them opportunities if they want to go further and get certificates and things, we will talk to them, we will offer those opportunities and we will pay for those opportunities." "One of my staff comes along to consulting sessions with me, so that's been really good learning for her as well. It's always great to see. You know, this won't be their career forever, so it really works well to assist them in a career move going forwards and if I can get more skills out of them from it as well, that's great."
Entrepreneurial Leadership	Life experience	Learnability	"There's been a lot of things happen in my life that have given me the ability to work through issues. You gain experience, even though everything's a wee bit different, comes from a different angle, and in a different way." "I think I use analogies from my life in the business which is a wonderful thing. I think it makes it way easier to connect with the people I work with."

	Optimism	Leadership	"I think we can be quite positive and enthusiastic for the future."
			"I feel like it's only going to get better and better for us – we'll be alright!"
	Perseverance	Stress coping	"I'm a practical person but I'm not very emotional. I know people who would've walked away after what we've been through, but we haven't. We have this written on the walls upstairs, "never, never, never give up"."
			"[Dealing with the unexpected] doesn't stress me out. I'm pretty fortunate in this situation, I don't get too stressed."
	Tight-knit structure	Leadership	"I'm just like a father figure, that's it… That's our village mentality."
			"We all just work together, it's a togetherness team… We promote a collaborative decision-making style."
	Personal investment as motivation	Leadership	"I want my business to win. I want my business to succeed. In some cases, losing is not an option… If my expectations aren't met, I get very disappointed and I feel personally let down."
			"There's a massive difference when you own the place and you're the leader of that, compared to being employed by a place and being the leader of that because you're responsible, accountable."
Informal Nature of Policies	Lack of preparedness	BCM and Crisis Management	"Initially because it was just a Chinese travel thing, it didn't affect us… I was sitting back thinking we were going to have one of the most, well, the most profitable year, and then it escalated, and suddenly, it was just chaos."
			"It was real quick, like I was a little in disbelief… We were there onsite the day before and we sort of thought, can't we still operate?!"
	Role ambiguity	People capability	"We're pretty lean on operations… You're sort of trying to focus on one area, there's all this other stuff going on too, which can be a bit detrimental to your work."

		"I do a bit of everything – marketing, weather man, accounts, bookings, you know, everything… It's pretty interchangeable."
Ill-defined Procedures	Risk management	"Our guidelines are essentially just, be aware."
		"Oh [health and safety] is a bloody nightmare… To be honest, I just keep telling people, it's just commonsense."

Discussion

While the global pandemic resulting from COVID-19 has presented communities, organizations and individuals with a plethora of challenges, it has also afforded many opportunities. The chance to conduct social-scientific research during an ongoing crisis is rare, and such a process is turbulent, but it is crucial. The aim of this study was to understand organizational resilience from the perspective of SMEs in the tourism sector, in relation to the ongoing pandemic. The qualitative data collected from business owners and operators at the time of crisis can be invaluable for the purposes of guiding crisis recovery, better preparing businesses against future events, and informing further retrospective research into the topic. For these purposes, the current study set out to form a narrative exploring how a collection of SMEs in the tourism industry were building resilience and coping with the impacts of COVID-19. Throughout this process, particular attention was paid to existing organizational resilience frameworks, in evaluation of their practicability and applicability to smaller organizations.

Interpretation of Findings

The concept of organizational resilience is not static. The generalized Herringbone Model presented here constructs resilience as a developmental continuum supported or undermined by several intra- and extra-organizational factors. The companies that partook in this research exist at a variety of points along the continuum, and that point is subject to change over time – for example, through organizational development, or through compounding impact of the crisis. The matrices in Appendix C give an interesting insight into the levels of organizational resilience each company showed at the time of interviewing, providing the basis for some noteworthy comparisons.

As can be deduced from the matrices, all organizations showed promise in one or more areas of resilience. For example, the majority of companies demonstrated strong entrepreneurial resilience through utilization of life experience (eight of ten participants), and motivation through personal investment (nine of ten participants). Analagous to the Herringbone concepts as outlined in Table 3, this suggests good learnability and aspects of good leadership. This finding indicates that entrepreneurial resilience forms the fundamental aspects of the organization's resilience in SMEs, substantiating the conclusions drawn by Fang et al. (2019), who found that the psychological resilience of entrepreneurs directly impacted their firm's organizational resilience in the aftermath of the 2016 Kaikoura earthquake. Comparatively, research on organizational resilience that is based on larger firms tends to have little to no focus on the individual resilience of leaders (Branicki et al., 2018). This further reinforces the idea that SMEs use unique mechanisms to build organizational resilience.

Furthermore, most companies (nine of ten) showed either evidence of shifting their market focus, or intending to do so, indicating their agility. Interestingly, this phenomenon was also present in the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquake, but it presented in a different way – specifically, as per Prayag et al.'s (2020) study on darkside tourism, some Christchurch tourism operators took the experience as an opportunity to change their market focus to offering earthquake tours to international tourists, and while this was not an option during COVID-19 due to its impact on the entire globe, the essence of changing to fit the remaining tourist market in the wake of a crisis remains the same. This is one example of how lessons in crisis management can be transferrable across situations to an extent, but the finer details of how that

lesson is implemented will vary depending on the nature and extent of the crisis at hand.

While all of the organizations in the study were able to survive in some capacity, there were particular organizations that stood out beyond others as having high levels of resilience, and this was reflected in their general attitudes throughout the interviews. Notably, organizations eight and nine were among the only ones to show evidence of considering employees as an important resource, adequately utilizing networks and technology, and clarity of roles and procedures. Regarding the utilization of networks specifically, both organizations were the only ones in the study able to give examples of how they engaged with other businesses and with the community around them to build social capital that they could rely on in times of crisis. Interestingly, the idea that external linkages play an important role in building SME resilience is precisely what Battisti and Deakins' (2012, pg. 39) predicted would come to light through qualitiative research furthering their own study on the outcomes of the 2011 Christchurch earthquake.

It is also of note that organization six was not far behind these two companies on the resilience continuum, but showed room to improve on enhancing employee wellbeing, and defining roles and procedures. Interviewees from organisations eight and nine were the most confident about their business recovery trajectory, which complements their indications of high resilience well. The interviewee for organisation nine can even be quoted as saying, "from every other disaster we've had throughout our history, our recovery has brought us back to a level that's been better than prior", which clearly illustrates the basic resilience principle of transcending original status post-disturbance (Lee et al., 2013). This suggests that a focus on valuing employees, full utilization of networks and technology, and well-defined roles

and procedures represent the pinnacle aspects of resilience for tourism SMEs, and companies that can capitalise on these resilience-promoting factors will be more likely to find themselves toward the higher end of the organizational resilience continuum.

Interestingly, despite some participants indicating high resilience, almost all organizations (nine of ten) demonstrated that they were inadequately prepared for the COVID-19 crisis and did not anticipate its extent. This phenomenon has been replicated by other studies on SMEs in tourism, such as Orchiston (2013) which found entrepreneurs in the Southern Alps to be overly optimistic about the time it would take them to repoen following a crisis. Conversely to Orchiston (2013), the findings of this study suggest that this tendency is actually a strength, as the almost blinding optimism is likely what enables entrepreneurs to persist despite the odds being stacked against them.

The experience of other crises, which makes Canterbury businesses so unique (e.g. earthquake, terrorist attack), seems to have done little to better prepare operators for this pandemic. The coronavirus pandemic has been colloquially referred to by many as ‘unprecedented’ (Dictionary.com, 2020), but theoretically there could have been partially generalizable knowledge gained from previous crises - for example, with regards to business networking, or employee wellbeing focus (Fang et al., 2020). On reflection and consideration of participant responses to one of the final interview questions, “How has this experience been similar to or different from the earthquake?” not one interviewee was able to give a concrete example of a transferrable lesson that they had used to develop crisis planning. This idea was prominent in research following the 2011 Christchurch Earthquake (Orchiston et al., 2012; Nilakant et al., 2013), which suggests that smaller businesses are unlikely to

have formalized crisis planning due to their size, and that such specific crisis planning is of little use to them anyway, when crises are so variable. Instead, the focus for such businesses ought to be on crisis management planning as building adaptability and learning capacity, which allows them to be more agile in the face of unexpected turmoil.

Limitations

When heeding the practical guidance outlined above, there must be consideration given toward a number of limitations evident in this study. The first and possibly most notable limitation is the small cohort on which the results are based. Due to the very specific focus of the study, there were a limited number of eligible businesses, and of those eligible a small proportion were willing and available to participate. It is standard procedure for qualitative studies to have smaller sample sizes in comparison to quantitative studies, due to the emphasis on depth and richness of information, but ideas on exactly how to determine the appropriate size remains vague (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Despite researcher determination that saturation had been reached after the 10th interview, there are concerns around the sample size being potentially inadequate to fully capture such a heterogeneous group of tourism businesses. In illustration of this, the data pool encompasses operators across the subsectors of tourism, and arguably each subsector may be different enough to warrant research of its own – for example, the subclassifications of transportation and accomodation are vastly different, and even within the accomodation sector alone there are several divisions (Camilleri, 2018).

The inevitable issue of "survivor bias" is also likely to be present in this study. As noted by Battisti and Deakins (2012), research conducted after a crisis most often omits firms that have closed their doors in the wake of the disaster. In this context, the

survivor bias may translate to missing those businesses at the lower end of the resilience scale, eliminating the possibility of valuable comparisons between businesses that survive the crisis and those that do not. Seeing as the research was completed while the pandemic was ongoing, it is possible that this bias was minimized.

It is also notable that while the study did include a number of businesses that classified themselves as targeting mainly the foreign market, the study did not include businesses that cater solely toward a specific foreign group – for example, tour companies that specifically serve Mandarin- or Dutch- speaking tourists. Including such businesses could have unveiled quite different results, as this would leave them in a more difficult position to pivot markets.

A further limitation is the potentially low generalisability of findings to medium-sized businesses. Because of the restricted scope of participants, the results reflect the experiences of business owners/operators of small and micro tourism businesses, despite efforts to include data from medium enterprises also. Yet, given the relatively high percentage of small and micro businesses in New Zealand by international standards (Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment, 2020a), the findings are nevertheless representative of the sector situation in the region, and may inform similar businesses worldwide.

Temporal issues should also be noted as limitations, as resilience is a dynamic concept. Firstly, the interviews were conducted across a period of almost two months. Because COVID-19 continued to develop throughout this time, and there was even some movement across response “levels” for the country’s most populated city (Auckland) within this period, there may have been reverberating effects on participant responses. In practice, the first interviewees who participated before the

lifting of travel restrictions may have been less optimistic or positive about their situation in comparison to their later counterparts, and may have had less time to implement risk management and business recovery strategies. This possibility has not been evaluated, due to limited scope of the project. Also in relation to time, conclusions about levels of resilience held by each business would be stronger and more reliable if it were possible to conduct follow up interviews with the participants, and assess whether their optimism (or pessimism) had been warranted by business outcomes. Again, this was not investigated due to scope restrictions.

Another consideration is the research methodology, as this study relies on participants fully and accurately disclosing the circumstances of their business without supporting evidence. Fundamentally, qualitative research is subjective, and it purposefully exists to capture participant perspectives, or versions of reality (Galdas, 2017). For this reason, it is necessary to rely on participant reports, and the concern of accuracy is at odds with the philosophy of such research. Nonetheless, interviews with managers would have been well corroborated by interviews with employees, to gain a more holistic idea of the company's true situation – particularly with regards to wellbeing concepts.

Contributions to Research and Implications for Practice

Drawing on the constraints and unique context of SMEs, and on insights from the current research sample, the present study proposes a modified Herringbone Model applied to SMEs. This model aims to provide important practical guidance for SMEs, by focusing on concepts that are worth developing, while removing extraneous concepts that are beyond practicability. As per the original Herringbone Model, resilience is constituted by of a number 'Activities/Capabilities', in combination with a number of important 'Characteristics', and according to research on entrepreneurial

leadership, some of these characteristics are attached to the owner/operator in smaller businesses, such as optimism and perseverance (DeVries & Shields, 2006). These concepts are synthesized in Figure 2 below, which shows the version of the Herringbone model adapted to SMEs.

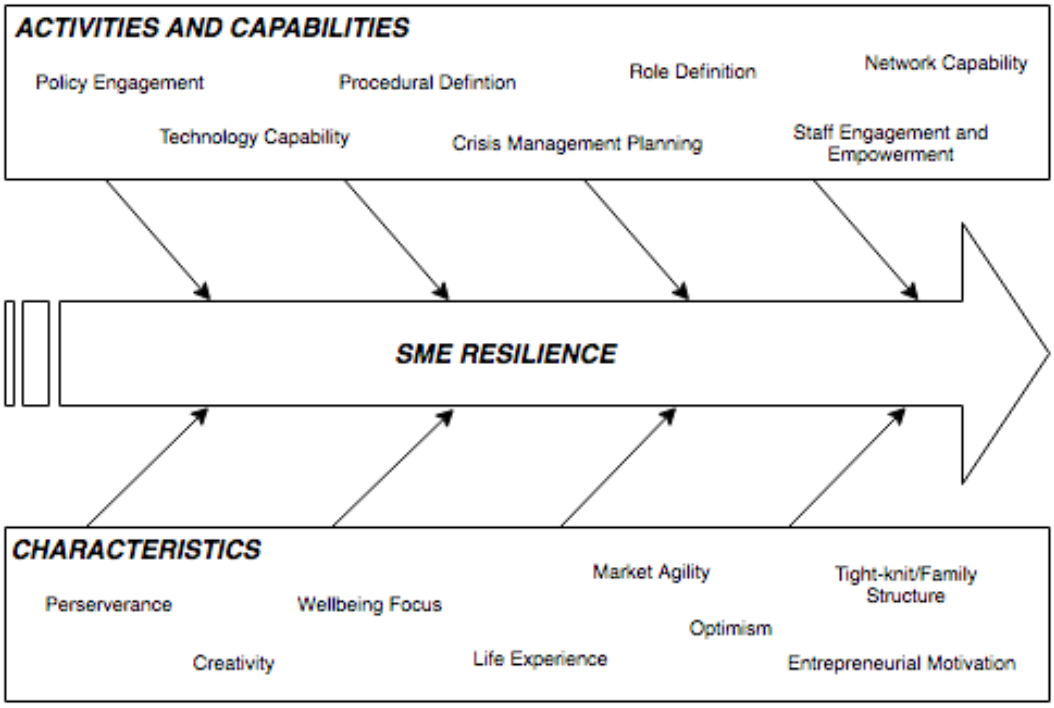

Figure 2. Adapted Herringbone Model of SME Resilience

The model consists of all the concepts identified in Table 3 as being analogous to the subthemes identified in the research data, and are therefore viable for smaller businesses to achieve. As a contribution to practice, the findings from this study also enabled the development of guidelines to operationalise elements of the adapted model in the context of SMEs. These guidelines were generated based on how businesses surveyed in this study were able to successfully use the resilience-promoting elements to build organisational resilience. A summary of the guidelines and research that supports them is presented below in Table 4.

Table 4. Elaboration on Concepts in New Herringbone Model of SME Resilience

Concept*	Elaboration	Supporting Literature	Practical Application in COVID-19 Context
Activities/Capabilities			
Crisis Management Planning	Compared to that of big organizations, SME crisis planning is likely to be informal and should focus on: 1) Ensuring the business remains adaptable (willing and able to enforce change), and 2) Learns generalizable procedures from past experiences.	Nilakant et al. (2013)	Managers were able to respond to the evolving situation of COVID-19, across changing alert-levels, using knowledge from business experience or contingency plans for other disasters.
Network Capability	In times of business as usual, the organization makes an effort to build social capital by establishing connections with similar organizations and with the community - for example, business collectives, organizations that offer complementary goods/services, or businesses with aligned interests.	Becken et al. (2014)	During and after lockdown, businesses were able to rely on pre-established connections with other tourism organizations and the community, in order to share information.
Policy Engagement	Owners/operators of the organization pay attention to the political landscape with a particular focus on policies that may have future impact on business operation, but also engage with local government to express their concerns in that forum. Owners/operators proactively pursue Government grants or schemes that will benefit their businesses.	Wilks and Moore (2004)	Owners/operators were able to access financial assistance from the Government assistance, such as the wage subsidy, and were able to express concerns around policy oversights (such as the exclusive criteria for the Strategic Tourism Assets Protection Program – see MBIE, 2020b) affecting their business in local forums.
Procedural Definition	Managers establish basic operational guidelines covering health and safety, which are continuously updated as the business changes, and are well communicated to all employees. Managers also make a conscientious effort to relay and adhere to these procedures, to instill health and safety as organizational values.	Wilks and Moore (2004)	Standard health and safety guidelines were well-established prior to COVID-19, which made it simple for owners/operators to incorporate and communicate the new guidelines necessary for operating in the COVID-19 environment – such as social distancing, additional cleaning and contract tracing. Leaders made an effort to recognize these new guidelines as being important, for the protection of their staff and customers, and to avoid costly fines set by the Government for failing to comply (per COVID-19 Public Health Response Act, 2020).
Role Definition	Staff, including the owner/operator, have clarity around their responsibilities and what is expected of them. That	Branicki et al. (2018)	Each staff member, including the owner/operator, knew what his or her responsibilities were prior to lockdown,

	is, these responsibilities and expectations are clearly defined and well communicated.		how these changed over lockdown, and how they changed again upon returning to work. All changes were well communicated to the team in briefings.
Staff Engagement and Empowerment	Enterprise staff are entrusted with adequate responsibilities within their role, including autonomy over these where possible.	Lee et al. (2013)	All staff were involved in the transformation of the business post-lockdown, assessing ways in which the enterprise could change to meet the new operating environment, particularly with regards to their own roles.
Technology Capability	In times of business as usual, the organization makes proactive capital investment in technology – including avenues such as online marketing and website development. Owners/operators make sustained efforts to keep up with knowledge around advancements in technology, specific to the tourism sector.	Gibson and Tarrant (2010)	Technology was being used by the business to increase efficiency prior to the pandemic, which gave owners/operators a foundation to build upon during and after lockdown. This enabled the business to operate in new ways – for example, food and beverage businesses being able to use a delivery app for socially distanced service, and tour/accommodation/recreation businesses being able to update their websites to showcase new features tailored towards the domestic market.
Characteristics			
Creativity	The owner/operator welcomes new ideas, by encouraging and enabling staff to participate in ongoing organizational change. Staff are given open channels of communication to relay these ideas, such as in regular team meetings.	Dahles and Susilowati (2015)	When the country was at alert level four (severe restrictions on activity), the staff used the break in service as an opportunity to brainstorm and research possible new avenues for the business. Suggestions were received openly by owners/operators, and some ideas acted upon.
Entrepreneurial Motivation	When faced with challenges and difficulties, entrepreneurs have motivation derived from their personal investment in the business, which they can rely on to justify their sustained efforts. Once they overcome something, they immediately refocus on their next goal.	de Vries and Shields (2006)	Despite the challenging impact of COVID-19 on mental health, experienced by many (Every-Palmer et al., 2020), entrepreneurs were able to draw strength from having personal investment in their business. This investment motivated them to continue working at bettering their business, and striving to achieve successive goals.
Life Experience	Owners/operators utilize their transferrable skills from extra-organizational experiences, and encourage staff to do the same wherever possible.	Walker et al. (2014)	Owners/operators and their staff were able to draw on past experiences of difficulties to cope with the stress of the pandemic.

Market Agility	Enterprisers look for ways to keep their business dynamic, and pay attention to market trends such that they are well positioned to re-define their target market accordingly.	Dahles and Susilowati (2015)	Owners/operators paid attention to what other similar businesses were doing in during and after lockdown, and also paid attention to what the domestic market was responding to, modifying their business accordingly.
Optimism	The owner/operator maintains a positive outlook on challenges, which they share with their staff. They also hold a constructive view of failure – as an opportunity to learn and further improve their business.	de Vries and Shields (2006)	When reflecting on their experiences of COVID-19, owners/operators were able to highlight positive aspects, such as the break in service allowing them to redecorate their premises, or giving them and their staff the chance to take a well-needed break. They were also able to find ways in which these experiences could be taken as lessons that would strengthen their business for the future, such as discovering more about the skillsets held by their staff.
Perseverance	Entrepreneurs are persistent in their effort to achieve business success, and share this unwavering attitude with their staff, despite the costs involved.	de Vries and Shields (2006)	Enterprisers were aware that they and their staff had suffered personal costs due to the crisis, in the form of mental health and finances, but these costs were accepted and the focus remained on how to continue in a "new normal".
Tight-Knit/Family Structure	The small team becomes a natural internal support system, such that each person feels known, heard and cared for, regardless of genuine family ties to the business.	Branicki et al. (2018)	Staff continued to support each other throughout lockdown. Managers noted that, because of this sense of belonging, their staff felt compelled to find a way of contributing to the business despite not being physically present at work. Examples of this included researching ways to attract domestic tourists, or updating marketing strategies.
Wellbeing Focus	In times of business as usual but especially in times of crisis, the wellbeing of staff is recognized as a business priority. This is stated as an organizational value but also conveyed in tangible ways – from instating regular check-ins between entrepreneur and staff, through to providing professional development.	Walker et al. (2014)	Managers made an effort to virtually check-in on staff and their wellbeing throughout lockdown, and upon returning to work gave them opportunities to get involved in reshaping their post-COVID roles.

*Note: concepts are presented in alphabetical order as opposed to importance, given that resilience is dynamic and concepts are heavily interconnected.

While ideas around SME resilience in the tourism industry have been cultivated here, further research is required to both expand on and challenge the findings. The body of literature reviewed at the beginning of this paper posits the idea that currently existing measures of the concepts are not well tailored to SMEs, so there is opportunity to develop survey instruments for further quantiative research, based on the concepts highlighted here that are well suited for use by SMEs. To illustrate, further research could aim to measure the various degrees of informal crisis management planning that exists across SMEs in tourism, alongside other concepts, and add a quantifying aspect to the Herringbone Model of SME Resilience that has been presented. If such measures were established, it may be illuminating to test whether or not a hierarchy exists amongst the concepts.

Additional research could also set out to retest the framework in a post-pandemic context, to try and capture more information about how such concepts would play out in an environment that more closely reflects ‘business as usual’. Other contexts to retest the framework in could also extend to cross-cultural applications, particularly because COVID-19 has played out in a unique way for New Zealand. Compared to citizens in other countries, kiwis have had markedly more freedom to travel domestically in the latter half of 2020, due to elimination of the virus through lockdowns and border control early on (Summers et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the concept of organizational resilience as it applies to SMEs in the tourism industry, through gathering first-hand information from leaders of such companies during an ongoing international pandemic. This research contributes novel insight to research and practice by being the first to take an organizational resilience framework, combine it with theory of entrepreneurial resilience and apply it to small tourism operators in a practical context. The findings of the current study draw the attention of SMEs in tourism to seven specific activities/capabilities, and eight specific characteristics that, if enhanced, can improve their level of resilience. For organizational leaders, the implications of these findings could mean significant increases in business sustainability, if resources can be better allocated toward the highlighted concepts. By heeding these findings, SMEs in the tourism industry may better equip themselves to face the next inevitable adversity.

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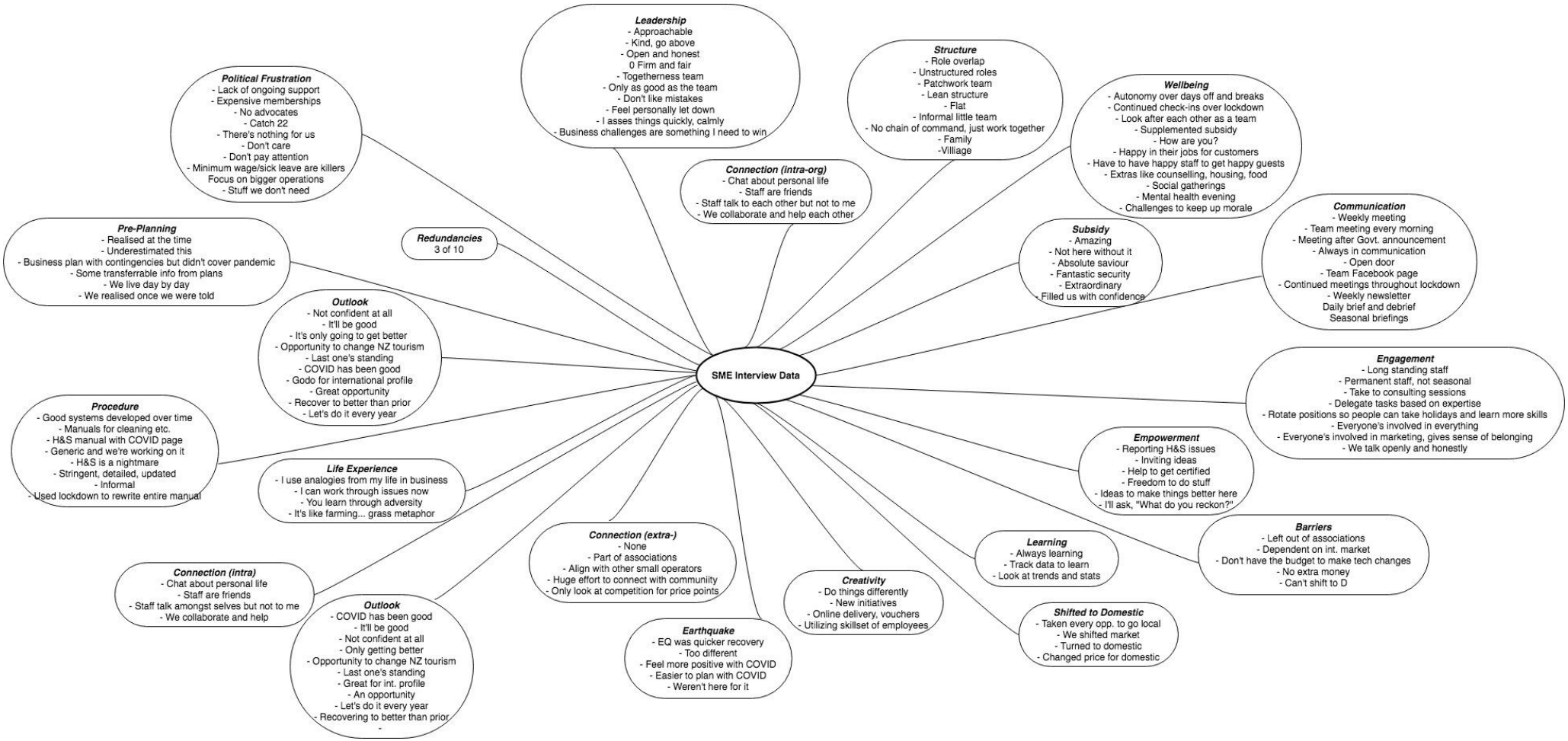
Appendix A. Definitions of Concepts Present in Herringbone Model (Gibson & Tarrant, 2010)

Concept	Definition
Activities and Capabilities	"What" the organization does, in both routine and non-routine times.
Business Continuity Management (BCM) and Crisis Management	Processes and plans used to identify and minimize potential risks
Communication	Ways in and extent to which information is exchanged
Compliance	How well the organization and its employees adhere to policies, standards and laws
Decision-Making Process	How and by whom choices are made
Emergency Management	Process by which unexpected disasters are dealt with
Financial Management	Function of organizing and overseeing monetary resources
Governance	The framework or structure that steers the socio-economic systems, which includes the organization
Infrastructure and Technology Capability	Effective use of capital resources
People Capability	Effective use of human resources
Relationship Management	Strategic maintenance of internal and external relationships with key stakeholders
Resource Capability	Effective use of financial, human and technological resources, and combinations of these
Risk Management	Proactive ability to identify and mitigate risks
Through Chain Capability	Level of operational dependence on supply chain
Characteristics	"How" the organization operates, determining how effective its activities and capabilities are
Acuity	Related to situational awareness of the past and future, with understanding of precedence and thought for foresight

Agility	Ability to make timely changes in response to the environmental volatility
Ambiguity Tolerance	Aptitude for continuously taking action and making decisions in extraordinary times
Behaviors	The organizational response to an event or situation as it presents
Creativity	Extent to which the business can find novel ways to work around issues
Culture	Well established awareness and understanding of change
Interconnections	Quality and quantity of bonds internal and external to the organization
Leadership	Degree of clear strategic direction, empowerment to achieve vision, and engendered trust
Learnability	The organization's ability to utilize lessons from experiences – both their own and that of others – to enhance their approach to dealing with the current circumstances.
Strategic Surety	Amount of certainty regarding the company's plans for future direction
Stress Coping	The extent to which people, processes and infrastructure can be upheld under duress
Trust	The amount of confidence people have in the organization and in each other
Values	Established commitment, trust and alignment that create common purpose

Appendix B. Data Analysis Mind-Map



Appendix C. Matrices Demonstrating Prevalence of Themes

Organization Characteristics			Participant Demographics			**Theme:** Business Growth Opportunities **Question:** Did the business show evidence of [subtheme] ✓ yes X no ~ salient	
	Sector	Size	Gender	Position	Education Level	Shifting Market Focus	Creative Flexibility
01	Accommodation	Small	F	Owner/ Operator	Tertiary	~	✓
02	Accommodation	Small	M	Owner/ Operator	Tertiary	✓	X
03	Accommodation	Micro	F, F	Co-Owners/ Operators	Tertiary, Tertiary	~	~
04	Accommodation	Micro	M	Owner/ Operator	Tertiary	✓	✓
05	Accommodation	Micro	M	Manager	Tertiary	~	X
06	Food and Beverage (F&B)	Small	M, M	Managers	Tertiary, High School Ed.	✓	✓
07	F&B/ Recreation	Small	M	Owner/ Operator	High School Ed.	X	X
08	Recreation	Small	M	Owner/ Operator	Tertiary	✓	✓
09	Tour	Small	M	Owner/ Operator	High School Ed.	✓	✓
10	Tour	Small	F	Owner/ Operator	High School Ed.	~	~

#	**Theme:** Enablers of Low Resilience **Question:** Did the business show evidence of [subtheme] ✓ yes X no ~ salient			**Theme:** Employees as a Valuable Resource **Question:** Did the business show evidence of [subtheme] ✓ yes X no ~ salient		
	Lack of alignment between policy-making and business strategies	Low Utilization of Networks	Low Utilization of Technology	Enhancing Wellbeing	Engaging Employees	Empowering Employees
01	✓	~	~	~	✓	✓
02	✓	✓	~	X	X	X
03	✓	~	~	X	X	X
04	X	✓	~	X	X	X
05	X	✓	✓	X	X	X
06	✓	X	X	~	✓	✓
07	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
08	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓
09	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓
10	✓	✓	✓	~	✓	✓

#	**Theme:** Entrepreneurial Leadership **Question:** Did the business show evidence of [subtheme] ✓ yes X no ~ salient					**Theme:** Informal Planning **Question:** Did the business show evidence of [subtheme] ✓ yes X no ~ salient		
	Life Experience	Optimism	Perseverance	Tight-Knit Structure	Personal Investment	Lack of Preparedness	Role Ambiguity	Ill-defined Procedures
01	✓	**X**	~	**X**	✓	✓	✓	**X**
02	✓	✓	✓	**X**	✓	✓	**X**	**X**
03	✓	**X**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
04	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**X**	✓	✓
05	**X**	✓	**X**	**X**	✓	✓	✓	✓
06	**X**	✓	✓	✓	**X**	✓	✓	✓
07	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**X**	✓
08	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**X**	**X**
09	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	**X**	**X**
10	✓	**X**	✓	✓	✓	✓	**X**	✓